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THE

STORY OF JOSEPH

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



ISABELLA WEBB PARKS



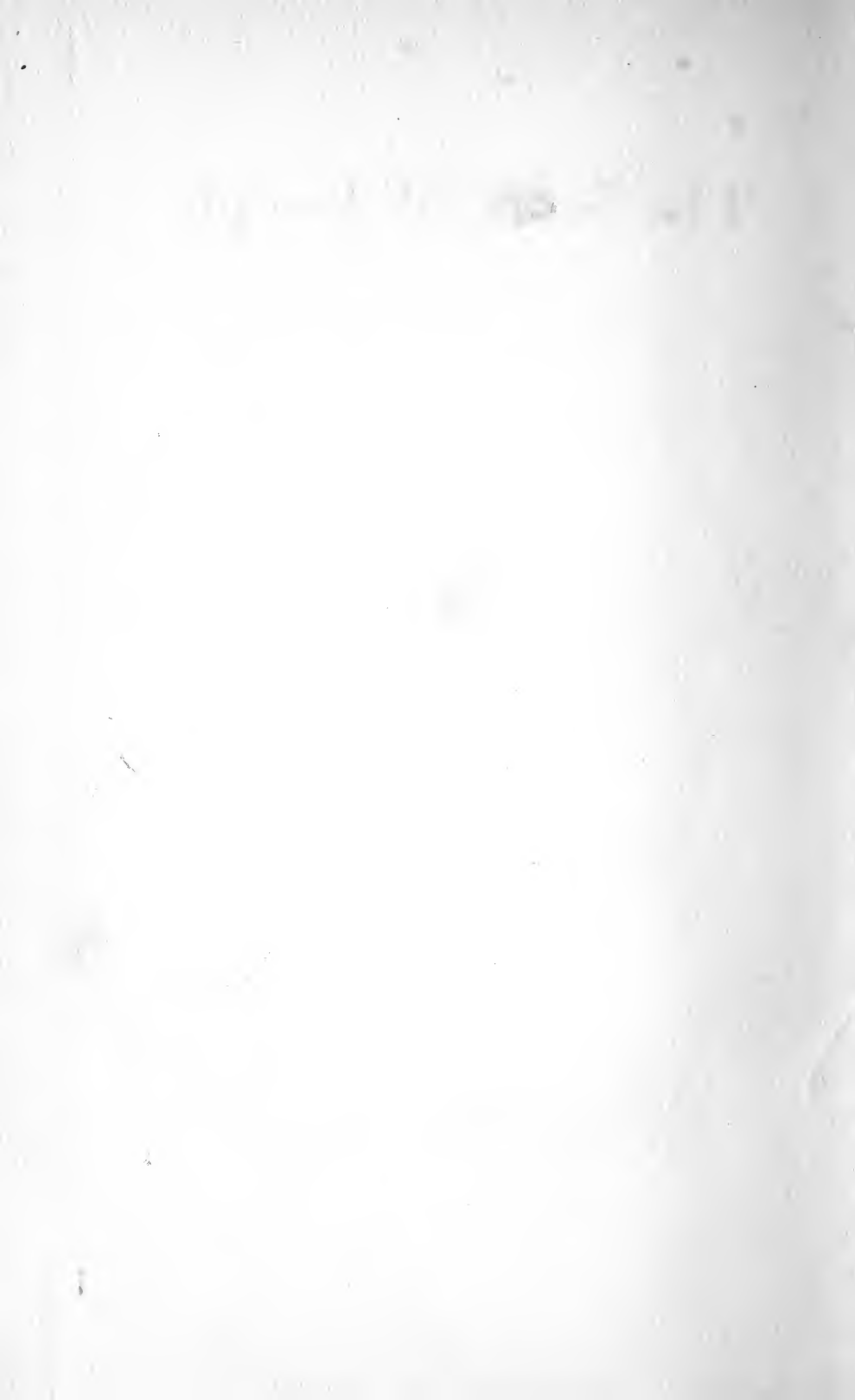
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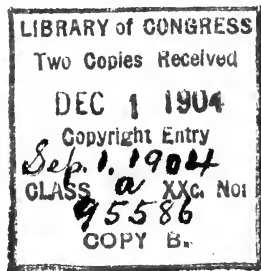


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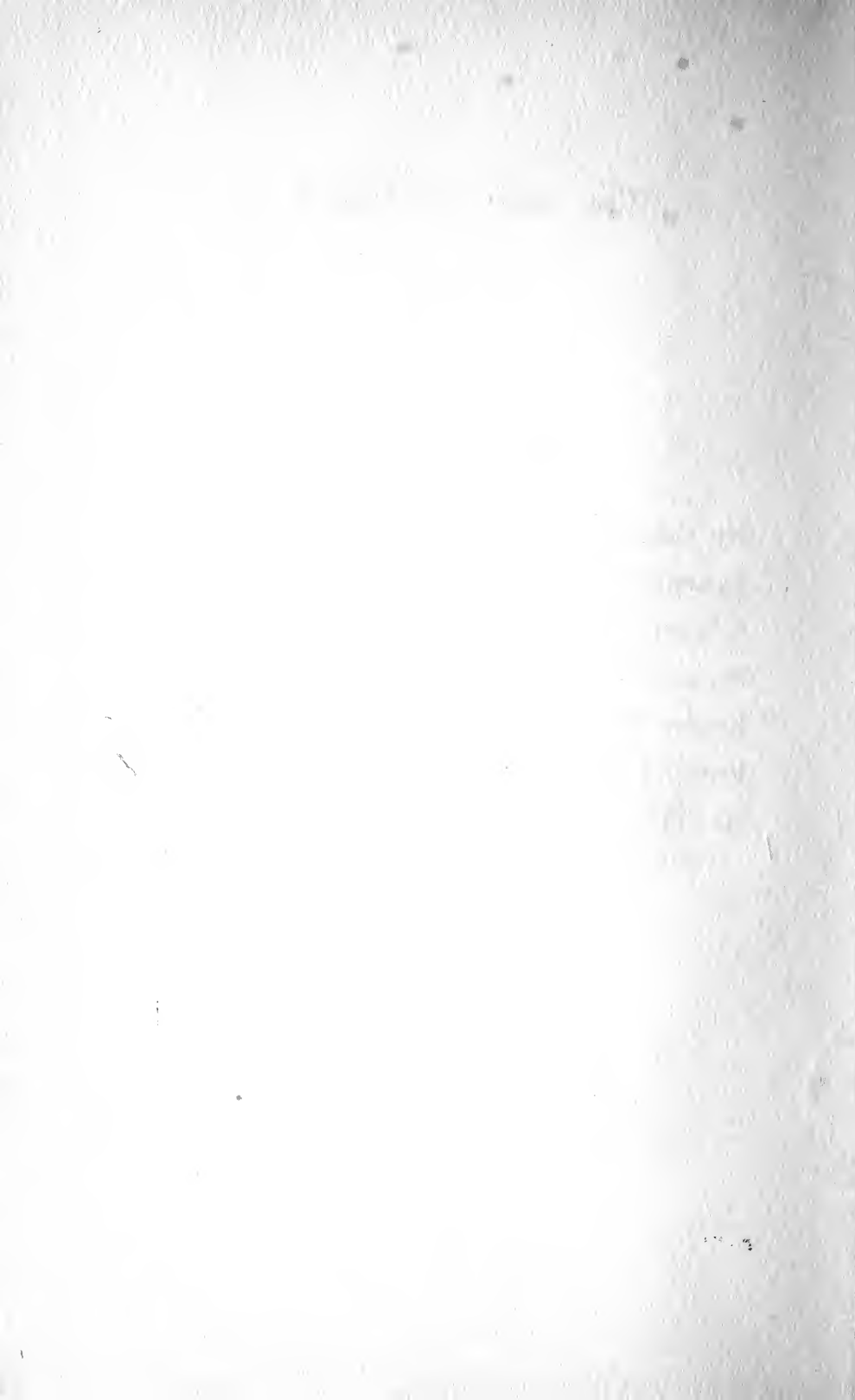
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The Story of Joseph

His Childhood

IN our time there is nothing that boys, or girls either for that matter, like better than to camp out. If they can spend a few weeks in the summer living in a tent in the woods or near a lake or river, they are happier than if they were in a palace. But the boy whom this story is about lived in a tent all of the time. Rather, he staid in one when he had to have shelter. Without doubt he lived out of doors most of the time, just as the boys and girls of the present do when they go camping.

He had eleven brothers. Ten of them were only half brothers. The father of all these boys was Jacob; but there were four different mothers. Leah was the mother of the four oldest—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, and also of the ninth and tenth—Issachar and Zebulon; Bilhah was the

mother of Dan and Naphthali; Zilpah of Gad and Asher; and Rachel, Leah's sister, was the mother of the two youngest boys, Joseph and Benjamin.

The chief business of people at that time in Palestine was raising cattle and sheep. Jacob was a very rich man, and had large flocks. The land was not fenced off, and did not belong to different people as at present. Every man was free to keep his flocks wherever he chose, and every one moved around as he needed to find pasture and water for his flocks. As the sons of a family grew up, they did not leave their home and go into business for themselves. They lived in tents near their father, took care of his flocks, shared in all that he had, and were ruled by him just as when they were children.

Boys of to-day may think that this was a fine way to live, a sort of eternal picnic, and there were so many boys in Jacob's family that they might have had good times together, but they spoiled all their pleasure by quarreling. Own brothers and sisters

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often quarrel; but in Jacob's family there was much more quarreling and ill-feeling than in most families, because of the children's having different mothers. The mothers were jealous of each other, and each mother was afraid that her children would not have as much and be as well treated as some of the other children. To make matters worse, Jacob loved the beautiful Rachel very dearly, and she was the only one of his wives that he seemed to have much affection for. He therefore loved her children better than the other children, and, as she died when Benjamin was born, he had a more tender feeling for her two boys than he would otherwise have had. He was especially fond of Joseph. We should have expected that Benjamin would have been his favorite, because he was the youngest. But when we read the story of Joseph, we understand why Jacob loved him so much. It was not alone because he was Rachel's son, and one of the youngest of his children, for Benjamin, as we have already said, was younger than he. It was because of his

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character. We see from his actions, from the way in which he won friends wherever he went and in whatever position he was placed, that Joseph was a very loving boy; that he had a sunny, happy disposition; that he was unselfish and truthful. It is very plain, too, that the stories which Jacob must have told many times to his children of God's appearances and words to their ancestors, Abraham and Isaac, and to Jacob himself had made a deep impression upon Joseph, very different from that which they made upon his older brothers. He thought these stories over and over. He believed fully in the promises that his people were some day to become a great nation, the chosen nation of God, and he tried to live as one ought to live who belonged to such a people. He sought to know God and to know His will, and he learned, as every one does who tries to know and obey God, to love and trust Him.

The older brothers were selfish and cruel and quarrelsome. They may have believed that God was going to make of them

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a great nation, but all they cared about it was for their own selfish purposes. They did not think of the work that God wanted His chosen people to do. They wanted to keep His favor just as they would of a powerful king; but they did not understand that right living pleased Him more than sacrifices and offerings.

Joseph was often shocked at the wicked things his brothers did when by themselves, and sometimes told his father of them. His brothers were already very jealous of him, because their father loved him so much more than he did them, and because bad people always hate good people. It made them very angry, therefore, to have Joseph report them to their father, and they hated him all the worse for it. At last Jacob, in his fondness, made Joseph a beautiful coat. It was of bright colors and rich material. It would naturally have belonged to the oldest, the one who, according to the customs of the time, should be head of the family or tribe when the father died. It therefore made them very angry that such a coat

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should be given to Joseph. So bitter were their hatred and jealousy that they could not after this speak a pleasant word to him.

Soon after his father gave him this coat Joseph had a strange dream, which he told to his father and his brothers. He dreamed that he and his brothers were binding sheaves of grain in the field together, and that their sheaves all bowed down to his. In those days people believed that future events were often told in dreams, and the meaning of this dream was so plain that any one could understand it. The brothers were very angry, and said to him, "Do you think you are going to rule over us?" They did n't believe that Joseph had really had such a dream. They thought he had made it up, and told it to make his father believe that God wanted Joseph appointed head of the tribe when Jacob died. Jacob might have been ready to believe such a thing, because he himself, in accordance with a revelation from God, had been appointed head of the family instead of his older brother, Esau. So, while it was an unusual thing, Jacob's

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own experience might lead him to do the same thing with Joseph, if he could find any excuse for it. Not only did he love Joseph more than the others, but he also knew that in character Joseph was much more fit to be the leader of the people of God.

Very soon Joseph had another dream stranger than the first, and, boylike, he told that too. It shows his frank and trustful nature that he ventured to tell it to his brothers after the way in which they had received the first dream. If he had really, as his brothers thought, been plotting to be made head of the tribe, he would have told it secretly to his father, and would not have let them know anything about it. It seemed to him a very strange dream, one that he could not understand, and he told it just as he would tell any other strange thing. We show what we are by what we think of other people. Joseph would not have done his brothers any harm, so he never thought of their doing him harm. They suspected him of deceiving his father and plotting to be made head of the tribe, because they knew

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that in his place any one of them would have done so. His second dream was that the sun and moon and eleven stars did homage to him. This time even his father reproved him, and asked him if it could really be that he was to rule over his father and his mother. It was possible that he should rule over his brothers, though very improbable, for he was next to the youngest of twelve brothers; but that he should ever rule over his father and his mother was too foolish to be spoken of. Of course, the brothers were more angry than ever, if that was possible, and hated him worse than before. But his father knew that Joseph had not made up the dreams, and, though he would not encourage him in supposing that such things could ever happen, he thought about the strange dreams a great deal, and wondered what they could mean.

Joseph Sold by His Brethren

JACOB was now an old man, and as he had so many grown sons they took all the care of the flocks and herds. He no longer moved about, therefore, but remained in one place. Not long after Joseph had told his dreams, the ten older sons drove the flocks away to find pasture for them. They went a long way off, and were gone a long time without sending any word home. After some time Jacob became anxious to know how they and the flocks were getting along. He therefore told Joseph to go and find them, and bring him back word. Joseph started out, but wandered a long time over the country without finding any trace of his brothers. At last he met a man who told him that he had heard the brothers say they were going to a place called Dothan. Joseph went to Dothan, and, while he was still a

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long way off, his brothers saw him coming. One of them said: "There comes that dreamer. Let's kill him. We are off where no one will ever know that we did it. Then we will see what will become of his dreams."

The ten brothers took up this plan with wicked delight, all except Reuben. He did n't want to do it, and begged his brothers not to do such a wicked thing. He reminded them that their father was an old man who had seen a great deal of trouble, and that he was so bound up in Joseph that it would break his heart if anything happened to him; that in spite of his father's partiality there was no danger that Joseph ever could be head of the tribe. He spoke of Joseph's pleasant temper and kind ways, told them it might not be so easy, as they thought, to make their father think that Joseph had been killed by accident, and urged them to think how their father would feel towards them if he ever should find out that they had killed their brother. But all that he could say did no good, and when Reuben found he could not persuade his

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brothers he thought he would save Joseph by a trick. So he said: "Well, if you are determined to kill him, let us throw him into this empty cistern and leave him here to die. That will be better than killing him with our own hands." The brothers agreed to this. Probably it delighted their cruel hearts to think of his dying a lingering, painful death by starvation and thirst. They liked to think of his having days in which to think of how he was punished for daring to tell such dreams.

When Joseph came up with a pleasant greeting they looked at him with scowls of hatred, and answered him with fierce and exulting taunts. They seized him, tore off his beautiful coat, and, in spite of his struggles and his cries for mercy, threw him into the empty cistern, and put back the heavy stone which covered it. Not long after this all of the brothers except Reuben were sitting near the same place eating their dinner. Reuben had gone away, perhaps to hunt up some of the flock that were straying off. The place where the

brothers were was beside a great road which went down into Egypt. At this time Egypt was a very rich and powerful country, and merchants from all the countries around went there with goods of every kind. They traveled in what were called caravans, many of them together, on camels and asses. This road was one of the most traveled in the world, for it led from countries in which were many valuable products. As the brothers were eating their dinner they saw one of these caravans coming, and one of them thought that here was a fine chance to get safely rid of Joseph and at the same time get some money. So he said: "Here come some traders on their way to Egypt. Let us sell Joseph to them for a slave. Then we shall be rid of him, and have some money, too." I think also that this one of the brothers was beginning to feel a little uncomfortable as he thought of leaving Joseph there to starve to death. Without doubt they could hear his cries and pleadings, and this brother's conscience began to tell him that all his life he would hear those

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cries, would never be able to quiet them. For when he suggested this plan he said, "After all, he is our brother." Perhaps the other brothers, too, had begun to feel the same way, and were glad of a way to get rid of Joseph without killing him. At any rate, all of them seemed to think it a fine plan.

So when the traders came along, the brothers drew Joseph out of the cistern, and began to bargain with the traders for him. Joseph was now in the deepest distress. In these days of railroads and telegraph, of daily newspapers and mail carried all over the world every day, Egypt does not seem far from Palestine. But it was a very different matter in Joseph's time. He knew that if he was sold into Egypt there was very little chance of his ever seeing his father again. Slavery is a dreadful thing any time and anywhere for any one; but to this boy, used to the free life of a shepherd, the petted son of a rich man and belonging to a powerful family, the thought of being a slave was almost unendurable. He therefore wept and begged. He tried in every

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way to soften the hard hearts of his brothers, but all in vain. They hated Joseph more than they loved their father. The traders were used to seeing slaves weep and plead when they were dragged away from their homes, so Joseph's distress was nothing to them. When they had made their bargain, they chained him up and drove him off. Reuben, who knew nothing of this, was watching his chance to go to the cistern when the other brothers were away and let Joseph out. It was not long after this that he saw his chance. He hurried to the cistern, thinking with pleasure how surprised and happy Joseph would be when he let him out. But when he uncovered the cistern Joseph was gone. Reuben was in great distress. He did not at first think that his brothers had taken Joseph out, and he therefore went to them and said, "Joseph is gone, and what shall I say to my father?" Of course, they knew from this that Reuben had meant to let Joseph out, and they must have told him what they had done with him. What they said to him to prevent his telling their father

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we do not know. Very likely they threatened to kill him. Probably, too, while Reuben did not want to kill Joseph, and while he cared more for his father than the others did, he was not really so very much better than they. He, too, was jealous of Joseph and glad to have him out of the way, so long as he himself did not have to do anything to get him out of the way. Then, too, he knew it would be very difficult, almost impossible, for his father to get Joseph back, even if he knew where he was. He had no one to send to hunt him up but his sons, and he surely could n't trust them. Reuben knew, too, what terrible trouble it would make in the family if his father should know what had happened. So he was easily persuaded not to tell. But they must make up some story to tell their father when he asked for Joseph. To be sure, they might have told him that they had seen nothing of Joseph, but for many reasons they thought it better to make their father believe at once that Joseph was dead. So they killed a kid, tore Joseph's beautiful coat in many places,

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and dipped it in the blood of the kid. We can imagine with what fierce delight they tore the hated coat and thought that Joseph would never offend them again by wearing it.

When the brothers went home, Jacob, seeing that Joseph was not with them, asked for him with much anxiety. The brothers looked at one another, as if they knew something that troubled them, something they did not like to tell, and said that they had seen nothing of Joseph. "Not seen him," cried Jacob in distress, "why, I sent him to find you many days ago." Then with much pretended hesitation and anxiety they brought out the coat and said: "On our way home we found this coat. We were afraid it was Joseph's, but were not sure, and we brought it home." Jacob, of course, knew the coat the moment he saw it, and he cried out: "It is Joseph's coat! Some evil beast hath devoured him! Joseph without doubt is torn to pieces." Then he wept and mourned, and all of his sons and daughters tried to comfort him.

A Slave and in Prison

JOSEPH was taken by the traders who had bought him of his brothers into Egypt. His beauty, his youth, and his generally pleasing appearance made him a valuable slave, and Potiphar, a high officer of Pharaoh's, bought him. Now it is that Joseph's true and noble character begins to show itself. It would have been very easy and very natural to give way to grief and despair. Joseph was only seventeen years old. He had never been away from his father before. He had always been petted and indulged. He had been used to a life of perfect freedom. Many boys would have sulked and fretted. They would have done only as much work as they found they must do to escape punishment, and they would have done what little they did as poorly as they dared. But Joseph, instead of thus making the worst of

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a very bad matter, began at once to make the best of it. He tried in every way to please his master. He was cheerful and respectful. He made great effort to learn the language as quickly as possible. He gave careful attention to his master's directions; tried to find out just how his master wanted things done, and then did them in that way whether his master was at hand to see him or not. His master very soon came to think a great deal of his bright, intelligent young servant, who learned so quickly and was so faithful and trustworthy; so, instead of making him a drudge, he put him in charge of all the work of his place. And not only did he leave to him entirely the oversight of the work, he also trusted him to buy whatever was necessary for the place. So, though a slave, Joseph's lot was not a hard one after all. But his position was one of great responsibility. It was one which demanded judgment and care. He had to learn how to use money wisely, and, what was more, he had to learn how to manage men. He could hardly have been placed in a position where

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he would have better training for the work which he was called upon to do later in his life.

But now an experience was to come which would put to the hardest possible test Joseph's character and his faith in God. His very goodness brought him into trouble. His master's wife was a bad woman. She fell in love with the handsome, attractive Hebrew boy, and tried to get him to be false to his master by becoming her lover. This Joseph steadily refused to do. At last, one day when she was in the house alone Joseph came in to see about his work. She took hold of his loose outer garment, and insisted that he should do her bidding. To get away from her he slipped out of the garment and fled. She was now very angry, and was determined to punish Joseph for his disregard of her. So she laid the garment by, called in the other servants, showed it to them, and told them that Joseph came in where she was and attacked her; that she struggled and screamed for help, and that he was frightened and left his garment in her hand

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and fled. When her husband came home at night she told him the same story. He threw Joseph into a dungeon. It was natural that Potiphar should be very angry with Joseph. The dreadful deed he was accused of was bad enough in itself, but it was made a great deal worse by the fact that Potiphar had trusted him so fully. It seems strange, therefore, that Potiphar did not have him put to death at once. We can not help suspecting that Potiphar did not fully believe his wife's story. After having known Joseph, it was not easy to believe himself so mistaken. Then, it is very probable that he must have known that his wife was not fully trustworthy. But however this may have been, there was no proof either way, and Potiphar was compelled to take his wife's word, rather than the word of a slave.

Many people even now would say under such circumstances, that it was of no use to try to be good and serve God; that either there was no God, or He did not take care of those who tried to serve Him. In Joseph's time it was harder to have faith in

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God than it is now, for people knew much less about Him. When we read of the wonderful visions of Abraham and others and the miracles that were worked, we sometimes think it would have been very easy to believe in God in those times. But these visions came very seldom, and to but a few men. Other people might have their doubts about them, and think that the person who had had the vision had only had a dream. Generations went by without either vision or miracle, and they had to be remembered by being handed down from father to son. There was no printing, no cheap paper, so there were no books or newspapers. There was writing, but it was done by hand on wood or stone. It was slow, hard work, and very expensive. Ordinary people could neither read nor write. So God's dealings with the few people who loved Him could not be known as they would be now in our land, where almost everybody can read and books and papers are so very cheap. But had it all been known, there was very little to know compared with what we know since

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Jesus lived, taught us about God, died for us and rose again; and since two thousand years have proved how true his teachings were. But Joseph had in his own heart the witness of God's Spirit that he was a child of God, and nothing can shake the faith of one who has that witness. He therefore never doubted for a moment that God was taking care of him, never wavered in his love and trust. In the prison, therefore, he was the same pleasant, cheerful, kind, conscientious boy he had always been, and he soon won the confidence of the keeper of the prison, as he had won the confidence of Potiphar. Instead of keeping Joseph closely shut up, the keeper made him a sort of under officer, gave him some care of the prisoners, and left him at liberty to go around the prison.

When Joseph had been in prison for some time, Pharaoh became angry with his butler, the servant who had charge of his wines and other drinks, and with his baker. What these poor men had done we do not know. Perhaps the baker had had sour bread, and

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the butler had not put sugar enough into his coffee. It does n't take much to arouse the anger of a despot. Whatever was the trouble, Pharaoh threw these two men into the same prison where Joseph was, and they, like the other prisoners, were under his charge. One morning when Joseph went into their cell, perhaps to take them their breakfast, he saw that the two men were looking more sorrowful than ever, as if they had some new trouble. In those days of cruelty people did not spend much pity on prisoners, and most jailers would n't have cared how sad their prisoners looked. But Joseph had a very kind and tender heart. Instead of thinking altogether of his own troubles, which were certainly heavy enough, his own troubles made him pity other people who were in trouble. He felt sorry for these men, and asked them what was the matter. They told him that each of them had had a strange dream, a dream which they believed would tell them their fate, but there was no one who could interpret their dreams. Why Joseph thought he could un-

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derstand the meaning of the dreams we do not know, but he said to them that the interpretation of dreams was from God, and asked them what their dreams were.

The butler said: "I dreamed that I was standing by a grapevine which had three branches. On these branches buds shot forth which grew to blossoms, then to grapes. I was holding Pharaoh's cup in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed their juice into the cup, and then gave the cup to Pharaoh to drink." Joseph said to him: "This is the meaning of your dream. The three branches are three days. In three days Pharaoh will restore you to your place; you shall be his butler again, and give him his cup to drink as you used to do. Now, when you are restored to your old position and have influence with Pharaoh, remember me. For the sake of the kindness I have shown you in prison speak a word for me to Pharaoh. For I have not done anything wrong; there is no reason why I should be shut up here. I am a Hebrew who was stolen from my own country, and I am in

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prison because wicked people have accused me falsely."

When the chief baker heard the meaning of the butler's dream, he hoped that his dream, too, might be a good one, and he told it. "I dreamed," said he, "that I had three baskets on my head. In the top basket were all kinds of bread and cakes for Pharaoh, and the birds came and ate them out of the basket." Joseph must have felt very sorry for the poor man, for this was what he had to tell him: "The three baskets are three days. In three days Pharaoh will hang you on a tree, and the birds will come and eat the flesh from your dead body."

It all happened just as Joseph said. Three days from that time was Pharaoh's birthday. He celebrated it by giving a great feast to his servants and by bestowing such favors or punishments as he saw fit. The chief butler he pardoned and restored to his old place, but the baker he hanged.

When the butler left the prison, Joseph hoped that he would remember his promise and try to get Joseph out of prison, but he

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did n't do it. Like other selfish people, he did n't care what other people had to suffer so long as he himself had all he wanted, and he forgot those who had been kind to him in his trouble. So Joseph staid in prison two years more.

Pharaoh's Dreams

TWO YEARS after the release of the butler, Pharaoh himself had two dreams in one night, which were so strange and made such an impression upon him that he felt they were not ordinary dreams. The first thing when he woke up in the morning he sent for all his wise men to come and tell him the meaning of his dreams. But when these men had heard the dreams, not one of them could tell him what they meant. Pharaoh was very much troubled, for he felt sure that the dreams foretold something of great importance. He was so disappointed and so anxious to find some one who could tell him the meaning of his dreams, that everybody heard of it. Now at last the butler "remembered Joseph." In all the time since his own release from prison he had n't troubled himself to so much as "remember"

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Joseph, still less had he made any effort to release from prison the man who had done all he could to lighten the suffering of his own imprisonment. Probably he never would have "remembered" him if he had n't had a selfish reason for doing so. He had n't cared to bother Pharaoh with petitions for a poor, friendless prisoner. But now he remembered how Joseph had told the meaning of his and the baker's dreams, and he thought if he should tell the meaning of Pharaoh's, that Pharaoh would be pleased, not only with Joseph, but with himself, the butler, and perhaps reward him as well as Joseph. He therefore went to Pharaoh, and with many expressions of sorrow for his neglect of Joseph, told of Joseph's interpretation of the dreams of himself and the baker.

Pharaoh was so anxious to have his dream interpreted, that he would have sent for any one who he thought could possibly interpret it. But he knew very well, as did every one else, that often people were thrown in prison only because a despotic master was

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angry with them. So Joseph's being a prisoner did not prevent Pharaoh's sending for him. Pharaoh may also have made inquiries about his case, and have found that in all his life as a servant of Potiphar's and in prison he had shown himself trustworthy except in this one case, and then there was no proof, only his mistress's word, that he had committed the crime of which he was accused. Perhaps, too, in this time something of his mistress's true character had become known.

But we can only guess about these things. All that we know is that Pharaoh sent at once for Joseph. It would be very interesting to know whether Joseph knew why he was sent for, or not. He, like other people, may have heard about Pharaoh's dreams and the wise men's not being able to tell their meaning, and he may have suspected the truth. But whether he did or not, he must have been excited and anxious. It was a very trying thing for a prisoner to be thus suddenly called into the presence of the great and terrible Pharaoh, and to have such a

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demand made upon him. But Joseph proved the truth of the promise, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee." When Pharaoh asked him if he could interpret the dreams, Joseph replied calmly and with perfect confidence, "I have no such power of myself, but God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

Pharaoh told Joseph that he dreamed that he was standing on the bank of the river. He says *the* river, as if there were only one river, and to the Egyptians there was only one. The Nile is not only the only river of importance in Egypt, it is the only means by which most of Egypt gets water for the crops. In most of Egypt there is no rain at all, nowhere is there enough for raising crops. Every summer the Nile, because of heavy rains and the melting of snow hundreds of miles away, overflows its banks and waters the country. The people also dig little canals and carry the water farther than it would go of itself. Besides watering the country, the river spreads out over the land rich earth which it has carried with it from

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its upper portions, so that the land in Egypt never has to have any other fertilizer. Without the Nile, Egypt would have been only a barren waste like the Desert of Sahara, of which it is a part. As it is, it is one of the most fertile countries in all the world. The Nile rises very regularly. It seldom fails, but occasionally it does not rise enough. Sometimes it rises too high. In either case there is more or less failure of the crops. So the Nile means to the Egyptians their crops and their food. It becomes very clear, therefore, why the cattle in Pharaoh's dream "came up out of the river."

"As I stood by the river," said Pharaoh, "behold seven kine came up out of the river, fine, fat cattle, and they fed in the meadow. But immediately after them came up seven other kine, poor, thin, and miserable. I never saw such wretched cattle in all the land of Egypt. And the lean cattle ate up the fat cattle, and when they had eaten them they did n't look as if they had had anything to eat, they were just as poor and miserable as they were before. Then I awoke. So I

fell asleep again, and I had another dream. This time I dreamed that seven ears of corn came out on one stalk, seven fine, full ears. And immediately after them sprang up other seven ears, thin and blasted with the east wind, and the seven thin ears devoured the seven full ears. Then I awoke, and it startled me to find it was only a dream. It had seemed so real."

How Joseph knew what the dreams meant we are not told. He seems to have seen their meaning as Pharaoh told them to him, and he said at once: "The two dreams are one; they mean the same thing. God has revealed to Pharaoh what He is about to do. He has doubled the dream because it is surely coming to pass, and that very soon. He wished that Pharaoh should be impressed just as he had been, so that he should find the meaning of the dreams, and be ready to do what should be done. The seven good cattle are seven years, and the seven good ears of corn are the same seven years. They are seven years of great plenty, seven years of very large crops. The seven

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poor cattle and the seven blasted ears of corn are another seven years, seven years of famine. Behold, there come seven years of great plenty in all the land of Egypt, in which the earth shall bring forth by hand-fuls. These shall be followed by seven years of terrible famine, when there shall be no crops, not even enough for seed. And as the seven thin cattle ate up the seven fat ones and were as thin and starved as ever, so the years of plenty shall be forgotten, because the years of famine shall devour all that the years of plenty produced."

Joseph seems to have felt that he was the messenger of God to Pharaoh. He had told Pharaoh at first that through him God would interpret the dreams, and now he does what he would hardly have dared to do had he not believed he was giving Pharaoh a message from God. He tells Pharaoh what to do to provide against the terrible seven years of famine. Men of high position would have hesitated to advise Pharaoh what to do until they were asked for advice, much less a slave and a prisoner like Joseph. But

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Joseph sees so clearly what ought to be done, and the terrible necessity of doing it quickly, that he does not hesitate. "Let Pharaoh," he said, "look out a wise, discreet man, and set him over all the land of Egypt, so that he can build storehouses and can appoint men who shall see to it that every year during the years of plenty every man shall bring into the storehouses one-fifth of all that he raises. Then when the years of famine come there will be food in the land, and the people and the cattle will not starve."

Joseph, Ruler of the Land of Egypt

JOSEPH's interpretation of the dreams was so reasonable that Pharaoh felt sure it was the right interpretation, and Joseph's plan for providing for the years of famine was so wise, that Pharaoh decided at once to adopt it. Nor did he have to think long to decide who was the best man to "set over all the land of Egypt." He said to his counselors, that if they hunted the country over, they would not find another man so well fitted to do this work as Joseph himself. Then he said to Joseph: "Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so wise and discreet as thou art: thou shalt be over my house, and according to thy word shall all my people be ruled; only in the throne will I be greater than thou." Then

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Pharaoh put his signet ring on Joseph's hand. This ring gave Joseph the power of Pharaoh. All papers sent out by Pharaoh's command had a little melted wax dropped upon them. Into this wax, while it was still warm and soft, the signet ring was pressed. When the wax hardened it bore the print of the signet, and every one who saw it knew that it was ordered by Pharaoh. So Joseph's orders would be obeyed as Pharaoh's.

The next thing Pharaoh did was to have a great procession, to let all the people see Joseph and know that he was the new prime minister. Joseph was dressed in rich and beautiful clothes, much finer than the coat his father had made for him; a gold chain was put about his neck, and he rode in what in those days was considered a very fine carriage, though we wouldn't think much of it now. It was called a chariot. Many of these chariots were handsomely ornamented; but they were only two-wheeled carts and could not have been very comfortable, however beautiful they may have been. Pharaoh rode in another chariot in .

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front of Joseph, and runners went before shouting to the people to clear the way and to fall down and do homage to Pharaoh and his great minister.

Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name, Zaphnath-paaneah, and gave him for his wife a woman of high rank, a daughter of one of the priests.

Joseph had now a great deal to do. He knew that the years of plenty were about to begin, and he must have the storehouses ready. He had to go over the land of Egypt, see where were the best places to build the storehouses, and decide how many there should be, and what should be their size. He must see to getting the material for them and securing workmen. He must find good men to oversee the building of the storehouses, and appoint others whom he could trust to see to it that every farmer brought in one-fifth of his crop each year. He did n't have time to go and see his father, even if he had thought it wise to do so, which for many reasons he did not.

He built storehouses, one in each city, and

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had them ready when the first crop of the years of plenty was harvested. Then, year after year, the crops were abundant beyond anything that had ever been known. The people would surely have begun to think that they were always going to have such crops, had not the story been around that the new ruler had said that these wonderful crops would last only seven years and then be followed by seven years of famine, and that it was for this he was storing up grain. But, though the people must have known this, they did not lay by anything for the years of want, and when those years came they and their cattle must surely have starved to death, had it not been for the grain which they were obliged to bring into the storehouses each year. When the seven years of plenty ended, the great storehouses were full. And now began the years of famine. At the close of the first year the people came to Pharaoh with a pitiful story. They had not raised grain enough for their own families to eat, not enough even for seed for the next year's crop, and they

begged him to sell them some from the storehouses. Pharaoh sent them to Joseph, saying that whatever he said should be done. Joseph opened the storehouses and began to sell grain to the people, taking their cattle as pay. But whenever there was a famine in Egypt, there was also a famine in the adjoining countries, and so it was now. The people in these other countries heard that there was grain in Egypt, and they also came and bought grain of Joseph. The famine extended even into Palestine, where Joseph's father and brothers lived, and in the second year of the famine Jacob said to his sons that he had heard there was grain in Egypt, and told them to go down and buy some. The ten oldest brothers set out, each with his ass and his sack. Jacob did not let Benjamin go, for Benjamin was the only son of Rachel's left, and now that Joseph was dead, as he supposed, he would not trust Benjamin out of his sight.

When the brothers came into Egypt and asked for grain, they, like every one else, were sent to the great ruler, Zaphnath-

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paaneah. All who came into the presence of one of these despots had to throw themselves at his feet. The moment that his brothers came before him Joseph knew them, and when he saw them prostrate at his feet he thought of his dreams about the sheaves of grain and the sun and moon and eleven stars, and he understood at last what those strange dreams meant. But, though Joseph knew his brothers, they did not see in this mighty ruler, dressed in the richest clothing and sitting in such state, the brother whom they had sold into Egypt. He was only seventeen years old when that happened. Now he was a man over thirty. And however little he may have changed in his looks, they would never have thought of its being he, for they could not believe that he had risen from slavery to be the first ruler in this great land. Joseph's heart beat very fast when he saw his brothers, and he could hardly keep from speaking to them at once in his native language, and asking them about his father and his brother Benjamin. But Joseph had many times thought of send-

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ing messengers to his father to find if he was still alive, and of sending for him, if he were, to come into Egypt. But always he had given up the thought, feeling that this would not be safe unless his brothers had changed very much since he went away.

So now, though Joseph could scarcely control himself, he made up his mind that he must test them before he could let them know who he was. If they were as bad as they were when they sold him, if they were jealous and envious of any one who they thought was in their way, if they still hated him as they did then, they would be ready to plot against him and get him into trouble, and a despot's court is a very good place for plots of this kind. So he did not show that he knew them, and pretended that he could not understand their language. An interpreter was therefore brought in, who repeated to Joseph in Egyptian all that his brothers said, and then repeated to the brothers in Hebrew what Joseph said in reply. Joseph must have had to make his plans very quickly. Probably he began with

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only a general idea of what he was going to do, and made his plans as he went along. The thing he wanted to do was to find out how his brothers felt towards Benjamin, who he knew must have taken his place largely in his father's heart. But he could not find this out well unless Benjamin was there, so he set out to get Benjamin into Egypt. He pretended that he believed that his brothers were deceiving him, and said to them very harshly: "You have not come for grain; that is all a pretense. You have come as spies from some hostile king to find out the poverty of the land, and whether it will be safe for him to come down and attack us in our distress." When the interpreter repeated this to the brothers, they began to deny it very eagerly. "We are true men," they said. "We are no spies. The reason there are so many of us together is that we are all sons of one man. There were twelve of us, but one brother is dead and the other is young, and our father would not allow him to come for fear some harm would befall him." Then Joseph said: "I will give

you a chance to prove the truth of what you have told me. Pick out one of your number, who shall go back and take grain to your families, and let him return bringing the youngest brother you talk of back with him. The rest of you I will keep in prison until he comes back. If he brings back this youngest brother, I will know that your story is true. If he does not, I shall know it is false, and that you are spies."

So Joseph shut them all up in prison until they should decide which one of the brothers to send back. But the brothers would not choose one of their number, for they knew that their father would think that the Egyptian ruler only wanted to get all of them into his power, or possibly he would think it was a trick of the brothers themselves to get rid of Benjamin. In either case, he would not let Benjamin come down. After a little Joseph thought of this, too, and decided that he must change his plan, so he called them before him again and said: "I am a true man. I do not want to do you a wrong. Your story may be true, and if it is

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I do not want to bring suffering upon you and your families. So, instead of keeping nine of you in prison and sending back one, I will keep only one and let the others go back. And at any time that you will come back with the young brother you claim to have, I will set free the brother you have left behind. But do not come back again for grain or for anything else without that brother; for if you do, I shall know your whole story is false, and you shall not so much as see my face." Without doubt, many times during all these years since they had sold Joseph the brothers' consciences had troubled them, but they had never said anything about it to one another. But now, in their own great trouble, standing before this hard-hearted despot who would listen to no prayers for mercy, their guilty consciences reminded them of the time when Joseph had sobbed and begged in vain, and told them that they were being punished for their crime against their brother. So strongly did they feel this that they began to talk about it, acknowledging their wick-

edness. Reuben alone felt that he was not to blame, and he said to them: "Did I not beg you not to sin against the child, and you would not listen to me? Now his blood is required." Joseph heard them and understood all they said. It touched him deeply, and he had to go off by himself and weep. But when he came back he showed no sign of any softened feeling. He had Simeon put into prison, and then ordered that the sacks of the other brothers be filled with grain. He also secretly ordered his servants to put back into the mouths of the sacks the money which his brothers had paid for the grain.

After the brothers had traveled some distance on their homeward way, one of them opened his sack to feed his ass and found his money. All of them were very much frightened at this, for they were afraid it might get them into more trouble.

Joseph Tests His Brothers

WHEN the brothers got home with their corn, Jacob was greatly distressed. At first he did not believe their story, but thought that they themselves had killed Simeon in a quarrel. What was more, he suspected them of plotting to get Benjamin away from him. This is shown by what he said to them when they told him what had happened. He cried out: "Ye have bereaved of my children. Joseph is dead and Simeon is dead, and now you want to take Benjamin also." It is plain that, while he did not know just what had become of Joseph, he no longer believed that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. He knew that the brothers had done something with him; he supposed they had killed him. It is easy to see how he found out that Joseph had been gotten out of the way by his brothers. It

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is impossible for ten people to tell a lie, and then be questioned about it over and over without being found out. Though the brothers had made up carefully the lie they were to tell their father, there were a multitude of little things that they did not think to arrange. Of course, Jacob in his distress would talk the matter over and over with different ones of them, and ask innumerable questions. Perhaps at one time he might ask just where and how they found the coat, how it was lying, and other particulars. The one with whom he was talking must make up his story on the spur of the moment. Another time, possibly, he might ask some one else who first saw the coat. The brother who answered this would be almost sure to give some other particulars which would contradict something that the first brother had told. Such things would happen, until very soon Jacob would become suspicious that they were not telling him the truth, and knowing the many other wicked things the brothers had done and their jealousy of Joseph, the horrible fear

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would come to him that they had killed Joseph. Then he would take pains to question them closely when they were apart, and without giving them a chance to talk with one another. A very few questions of this kind would make him feel sure that Joseph's brothers had made way with him. It was not strange, therefore, that he did not now believe their story about Simeon, and of the Egyptian ruler's having commanded them to bring Benjamin to him. Reuben, trying to convince him that they were not plotting against Benjamin, said: "You may kill my two sons if I do not bring him back in safety." But Jacob replied: "Benjamin shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead and he only is left of his mother; if mischief befall him by the way which ye go, then shall ye bring my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave."

But the famine continued, and when they had eaten all the grain Jacob told his sons to go back to Egypt for more. But the brothers knew it was useless to go without Benjamin, and Judah said to him: "Father,

it is of no use for us to go unless we take Benjamin, for the man told us that unless Benjamin was with us we should not so much as see his face." Then Jacob asked: "What did you tell the man that you had another brother for?" They replied that the man had asked about their family, whether their father was alive, and whether they had other brothers. "How could we know," they asked, "that he would command us to bring our brother back with us?" Then Judah said: "Put the boy in my care and hold me responsible for him. We must have grain or we shall starve, and if we had not waited we might have been back by now." It made Jacob feel safer to have Joseph in the care of one brother who was pledged to bring him back. Besides, in the weeks that had passed since their return, he had questioned them many times apart, and had come to believe that this time they were telling him the truth, for in every particular they told the same story; they never contradicted either themselves or one another. So, as they must have grain or die, he finally

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consented to let them take Benjamin. But he directed them to take back the money they had found in their sacks and other money also, and to take a present to the man of choice fruit, balm, spices, myrrh, nuts, and almonds, and he let them go with the prayer, "God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release unto you your other brother and Benjamin."

When the brothers reached Egypt they sent word to Joseph, or Zaphnath-paaneah, which was the name by which they knew him, that they had come for more grain, and had brought their youngest brother. When Joseph received their message, it was not easy for him to appear indifferent. At last, after all these years, he was to see his only own brother, whom he tenderly loved; perhaps he would see his father and have his family with him again. In spite of their ill-treatment he had forgiven his half-brothers, and had even a feeling of affection for them. But he controlled himself, excited as he must have been, and simply gave orders that the men should be taken to his

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own house and have their dinner there with him. Very great attention from a despot is often a dangerous honor, and the brothers, instead of being pleased, were frightened. They said to one another that perhaps they were to be called to account for the money which they had found in their sacks. When they entered the house, therefore, they went at once to the steward and offered him the money, explaining that they had found it in their sacks. But he refused to take it, saying that their God had put treasure in their sacks.

When Joseph came in his brothers again threw themselves at his feet, and offered him the present they had brought. Joseph's heart was very full when he saw his brother Benjamin, and he was very anxious to know whether his father was well. But he asked them calmly about their father, and then turning to Benjamin, said: "Is this your youngest brother of whom ye spake to me? God be gracious to thee, my son." Then he turned hastily and left the room, for he could no longer hold back his tears nor con-

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trol his desire to clasp Benjamin in his arms. When he had grown calm again, he washed his face and came back, and ordered dinner to be served. Egyptians would not eat with Hebrews, and so the brothers were seated at a table by themselves, and to their great astonishment they found that they were seated according to their ages. They could not understand how this Egyptian ruler could know their ages, for some of them were so nearly the same age that no one could tell by their looks which was the older. Joseph did not do this to make them wonder. It would be a proof that he was Joseph if he should tell them who he was, for no stranger could have known their ages. But his reason was to let his servants know their ages, for which he had a purpose as we shall soon see.

When the meal was over Joseph had his brothers' sacks filled with grain, and he also directed his servants secretly to put into Benjamin's sack the beautiful silver cup that he himself used at his meals. Then he sent them away. Soon after the brothers had

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gone Joseph called some of his servants, and ordered them to hasten after the men and accuse them of having stolen his cup, and he directed them as to just what they were to do and say. The servants very soon overtook the brothers, and said to them: "Why have you returned evil for good? You have stolen our lord's cup that he drinks from, and in which he tells what is going to happen." In those times it was commonly believed that some people had power to tell what was going to happen by pouring water into a silver cup and looking into it. Joseph was playing Egyptian, and, as he was already famed for having foretold the future, he pretended to his brothers that he used this cup for that purpose. The brothers were very indignant at being accused of such a thing. They knew they were innocent, and were anxious to prove their innocence. So they said: "We brought back the money that we found in our sacks; is it likely we would steal silver and gold from your lord's house? Search our sacks. If the cup is found with any of us, we will

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go back and become your master's slaves." The servants said that the one who had the cup should go back as a slave, but that the rest need not. Then they began their search, examining first the sack of the oldest and going on down to the youngest. We see now why they were seated at the table according to their ages, why Joseph wished the servants to know them. The sacks of the first ten were searched, and no cup found. But when Benjamin's sack was opened, there lay the cup in its mouth. The brothers could hardly believe their eyes; but their grief was greater than their astonishment. A few minutes before they had been going on their way rejoicing that they were returning to their father with both Benjamin and Simeon safe. Now their joy was turned into deepest anguish. They knew that to go back without Benjamin would break their father's heart; that he would, as he had said, die of grief. Something during these years had softened their hearts and made their consciences more tender. Perhaps, as year after year they had seen

their father's grief for Joseph, a grief from which he never recovered, as they had seen his form grow bent and his hair turn white, they had wished that they had not sold their brother. Certainly they were very much changed. How glad they would have been once of such a chance to get rid of Joseph as they now had of getting rid of Benjamin, and they had much the same reasons for being jealous of Benjamin that they had had for being jealous of Joseph. Had they been the same bad men they were when they sold Joseph, it would not have grieved them to leave Benjamin a slave in Egypt; they would rather have been glad of such a chance to get rid of him. But now they felt they would rather stay with him than go home without him. All of them therefore went back, willing to take any risk for themselves in their efforts to free Benjamin.

He Makes Himself Known to His Brothers

WHEN the brothers were brought before Joseph he was very much rejoiced, for it showed him that they were very much changed, and he began to feel sure that he could tell them who he was, and bring them and his father to live near him. But he was determined to fully test them. So he said to them, through an interpreter, remember: "What is this that you have done? Did you not know that such a man as I am would surely know what you had done?" The brothers did not believe that Benjamin had taken the cup. They knew he would not do such a thing. Besides, they knew how their own money had been returned to them on their first trip, and when their sacks were opened in searching for the cup they had

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seen that their money had been returned the second time. They knew, therefore, that some one had put the cup into Benjamin's sack to get them into trouble. Very likely they suspected that it had been done by Joseph's order, for despots are never above doing such things. But they knew that no explanations or denials would be listened to; that if they attempted to make any, it would probably only make the ruler angry, and they would fare worse than if they kept still. So they only said: "What shall we say unto my lord? The sin of thy servants has found them out. We have returned to bear our punishment and to be your slaves." To this Joseph replied: "O, no! I would not do such an unjust thing as to punish you all for the crime of one. None of the rest of you stole anything, though you had just as much chance as he had. All of you may go back and take grain to your families except the one who stole the cup. He must stay and be my slave." It was dangerous to argue with a despot who had power to take the liberty and life of any one he

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chose. Many a man who asked for another man's life to be spared only lost his own. Judah knew this; but he had promised his father to bring Benjamin back. He would stay as a slave himself; he would die, if need be; but he would not go home without his brother, so he dared to beg this hard-hearted ruler, Zaphnath-paaneah, to listen to what he had to say. He began by reminding him of the first coming of the brothers; of Zaphnath-paaneah's accusations, of his demand that they should bring down their youngest brother as proof that their story was true. He told how, when his father had heard it, he had said that Benjamin should not come down, and that, even when their grain was gone and they must starve unless they could get more, Jacob had still refused to let Benjamin go until he, Judah, had promised that he would be responsible for him, and would not return without him. "Now," said Judah, "if I go back without the boy my father will die, and I shall have brought down his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. I can not go back and see the an-

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guish of my father. Now, therefore, I pray thee, let me stay and be your slave, and let the boy go back."

Joseph had found out what he wanted to know. He could trust his brothers. He could let them know who he was. He could see his father once more and have all his family about him. He turned to his Egyptian servants and said to them, "All of you leave; I do not want a single one of you to stay." We can imagine how astonished the brothers were as they saw the servants all go away and leave them alone with the great ruler. Not even the interpreter remained. What could it mean? But they had only a few minutes to wonder, for the moment that the last servant was gone Joseph turned to them, and, speaking for the first time in their own language, said: "I am Joseph. Doth my father yet live?" Then he broke down weeping. At first his brothers were too astonished and frightened even to think. They neither moved nor spoke, but stood still and stared at one another until Joseph said, "Come near to me,

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I pray you." Then, without a word, they moved up around him. "I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt," he said, repeating each particular as if to assure them that it was surely he, for how could any one else know their lost brother's name and that they had sold him into Egypt? Then remembering their self-reproaches when they did not know that he understood what they were saying, and to assure them that he forgave them, he said: "Now be not grieved or angry with yourselves that you sold me here, for it was God's plan that I should come here and preserve life. For the famine already has lasted two years, and there will be yet five years more in which there shall be no harvest. God sent me here to save your lives and the lives of your children. So, now go back and tell my father all that you have seen of my power here in Egypt, and bring him and your families and your flocks and your herds down here, where I can take care of you during the years of famine." Then he turned to Benjamin and said: "You see it is my own mouth that is

speaking. I am not talking through an interpreter. You can assure my father that I am really Joseph, and make haste and bring my father here." Then he took Benjamin in his arms and kissed him and wept on his shoulder, and kissed all of his brothers. After this he talked a long time with them, telling them all that had happened to him after they sold him, and how he had risen from a poor slave to the man next in power to Pharaoh himself.

When Pharaoh heard that Joseph's brothers had come he was very much pleased, and sent word to Joseph to have his brothers come and live in Goshen, the very choicest part of the land, and to tell them that they need not bring anything with them, for they could have anything that they wanted in the land.

Joseph did not send his brothers away this time with just their sacks of grain. He gave them also wagons loaded with provisions and with presents for his father. He also gave each of them a change of clothing, and to Benjamin he gave five changes

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of clothing and three hundred pieces of silver. He still seems to have feared they might quarrel as they used to do when he was a boy, for, as they were leaving, he said to them, "See that ye fall not out by the way."

Jacob had seen his sons go away with a heavy heart, and after they were gone he grew more and more anxious, and the days seemed to creep more and more slowly by. As the time came when he could begin to expect them home, we can see the old man sitting by the roadside or walking slowly back and forth, watching by the hour for some sign of their return. When he first caught sight of the wagons he could not have thought it was his sons, and when they came near enough for him to recognize them he did not know what to think of the wagons and asses that were with them. Perhaps he thought they had fallen in with a company of traders. Then how eagerly he tried to make out with his dim eyes whether Benjamin and Simeon were with them. When he saw that both were there he was overcome

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with joy. But now the brothers drew near, and as he greets them with a happy heart they say to him: "This is not all. Not only are Benjamin and Simeon here in safety, but Joseph is still alive and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt. He is the man who would not let us have more grain unless we brought Benjamin down. And now he has commanded that you and all our families come down into the land of Egypt and live near him, where he can take care of us." At first Jacob could not believe their story, and they had to explain to him how Joseph came to be in Egypt by telling him the whole shameful story of how they had sold him, and then lied to him about it. Then they showed Jacob the beautiful presents Joseph had sent him and repeated his messages, and Jacob doubted no longer, but said: "It is enough. Joseph my son is yet alive. I will go and see him before I die."

As quickly as possible Jacob with his children and their families, seventy in all, got ready and started for Egypt. But Palestine, the land in which they were living, was

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the land which long years before God had promised Abraham, the grandfather of Jacob, should belong to his descendants. So, though Jacob was very anxious to go to Egypt and live near Joseph, after he had started he became troubled for fear he was doing wrong in leaving the land, and fearful that his children might thus lose the land altogether. So at a place called Beersheba he stopped and offered sacrifices to God, and that night he had a vision in which God told him not to fear, but to go on into Egypt to Joseph, for there God would make of him a great nation, and would surely lead the nation back into the promised land.

When Joseph heard that his father was on his way he went with a great escort to meet him, and they fell into each other's arms and wept for joy.

Pharaoh received them with honor. Jacob was presented to him, and instead of having to prostrate himself before Pharaoh, Pharaoh received the blessing of Jacob as from a priest. Some of the brothers were appointed to take care of Pharaoh's flocks

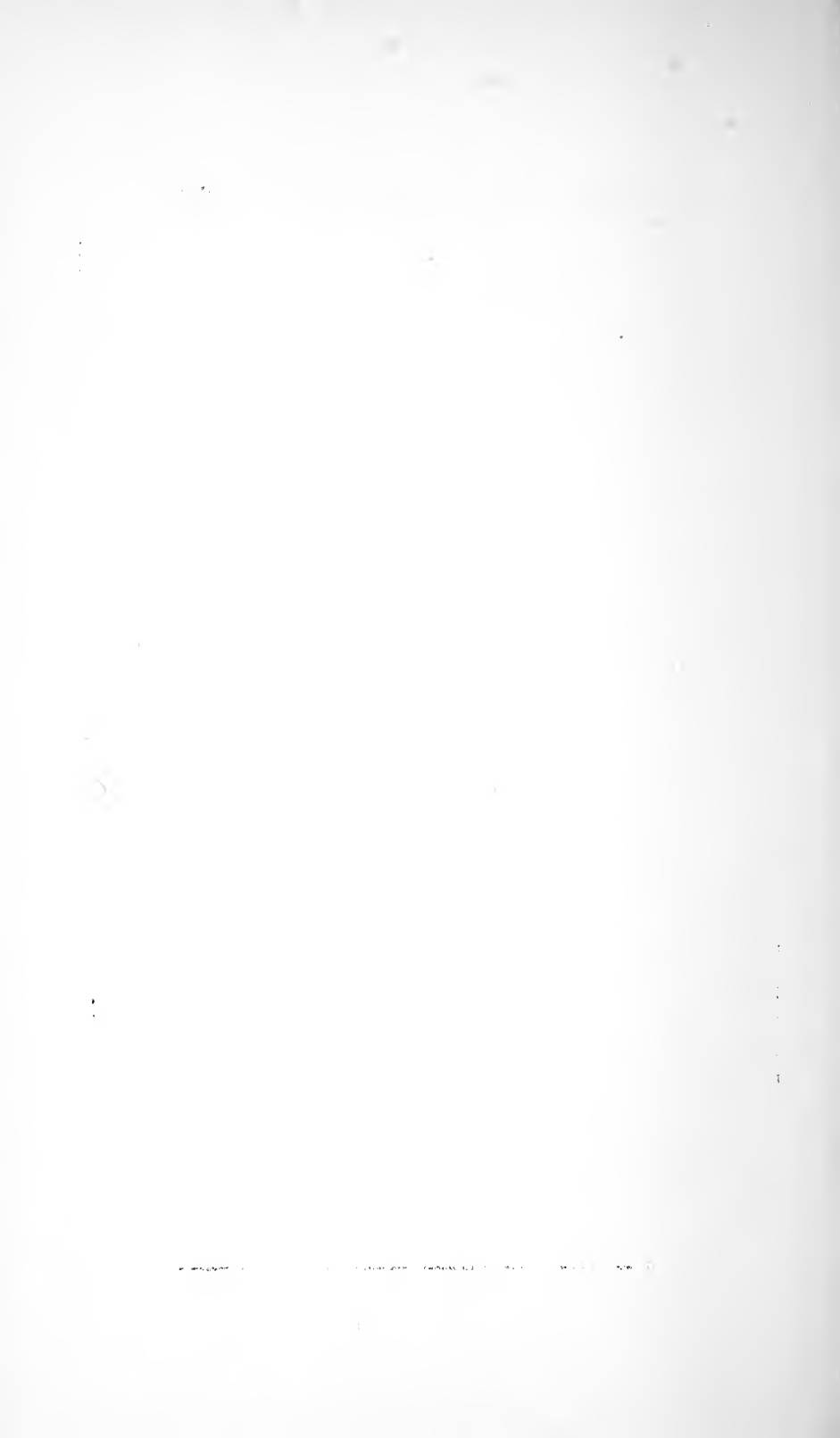
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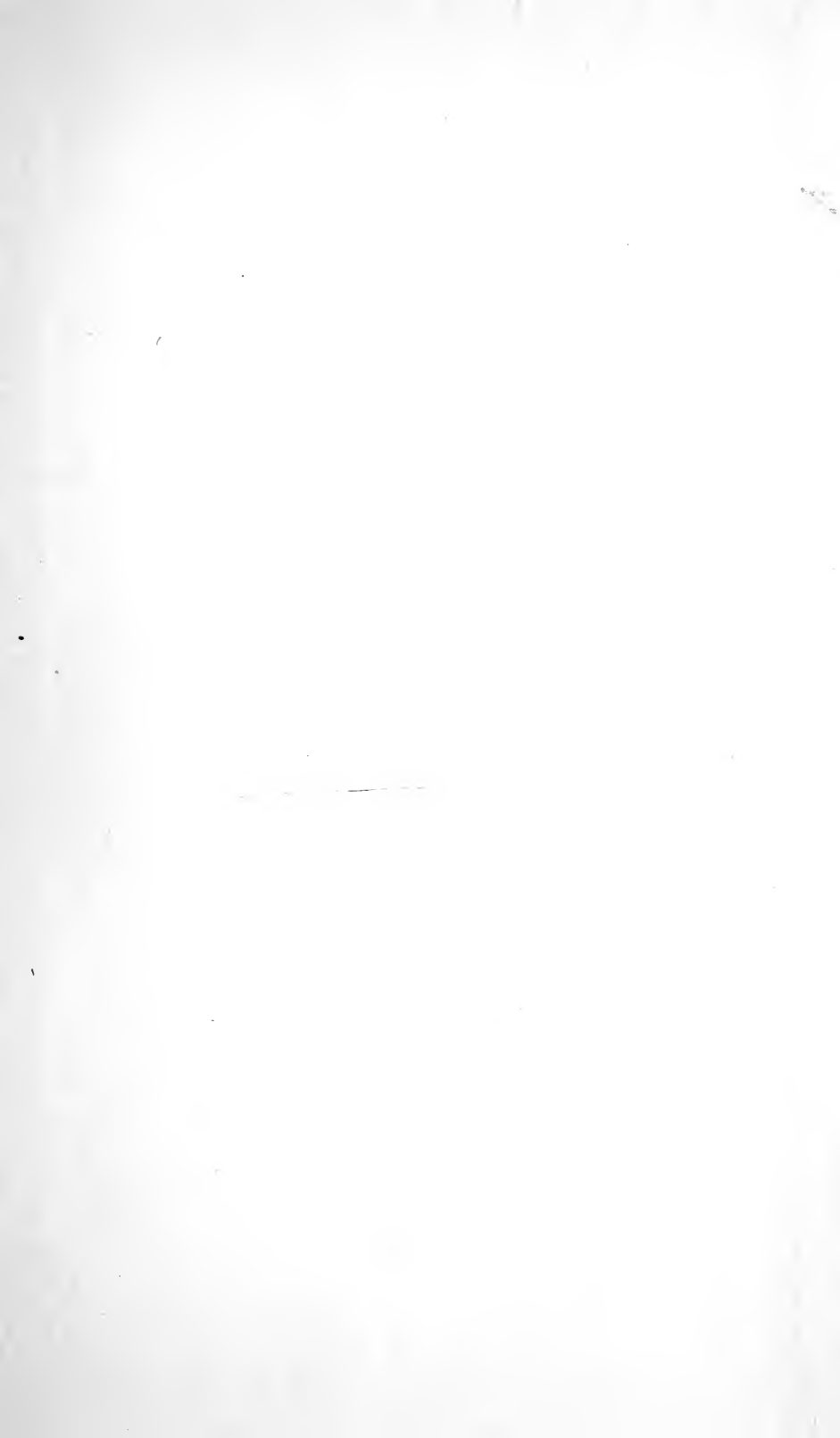
and herds, and the whole family settled down within easy reach of Joseph.

It is not always that those who trust God have their wrongs righted in this world, as Joseph did. But it is always safe to trust God, whatever the results may be here. Who would not rather be Paul who was beheaded, than the wicked emperor, Nero, who beheaded him?

We must not, either, make the great mistake of thinking that because God overruled the wickedness of Joseph's brothers, God wanted them to do what they did. God had enough ways of getting Joseph into Egypt and making him prime minister without any one's committing a crime. God is not so helpless that it is necessary for people to do wicked things to help Him carry out His plans. We may always be sure, whenever we see the wickedness of men seeming to carry out God's plans, that it is only because He overruled their wickedness and that He had better ways of bringing about the same result. God rules the world not because of men's wickedness, but in spite of it.







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